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FLORENCE, SHEILA KAREN. A Graphic Presentation of the Spatio/
Structural Relationships in the Development of the Tree-Form.
(1969) Directed by: Professor Helen A. Thrush. pp. 12.

I am concerned with the relationship of art to nature, nature seen as a building process, a growth process. Looking at this constructive pattern, the structural relationships are used to create a new concept of nature. This new interpretation of nature sees the unification of natural things, their similarity and their interdependence. A pattern develops, one of definite purpose with clarity and symmetry of organization. Nature as an actual constructive agent deals with form-in-development.

To illustrate this growth pattern in nature, I have chosen the tree as a point of departure. My prints present the plane-linear aspects of the tree as a structural pattern in nature perceived on a two-dimensional surface. This object-structure is attained through personal interpretation of the tree as a series of vertical and modified horizontal elements. These verticals (or stems) and horizontals (or branches) present themselves in such a way as to create over-lapping planes in various spatial positions and definite positive-negative shapes when seen against the sky. When regarded from this point of view, the tree's basic forms of cylinder, cone or sphere are understood as plane-linear aspects of a constructive pattern in nature. We see the more intimate view of its structure as based upon the growing and unfolding processes of nature itself.

7 It is my conclusion that the graphic quality of a

wood-cut line lends itself well to the effect desired when combined with the flat, unobtrusive color of the silk-screen. The observer is free to discover the similarities between leaf and tree, image and mirror-image, root-trunk system compared with branch-twig system. When man understands the structural relationships of nature-objects, he gains insight into the growing processes which create the delicate interdependence of man and nature.

A GRAPHIC PRESENTATION OF THE SPATIO/STRUCTURAL
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE TREE-FORM

by

Sheila Karen Florance

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The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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CHAPTER I

Trees to Mankind

Man's origin, his uniqueness, and perhaps even the continuity of his existence are closely tied to the life of trees. Had there been no trees, perhaps the human race would never have come into being. An impressive number of scientists believe that only an arboreal life could have led to the development of the human hand.

This arboreal life offered many things to primitive man. His new-born child was brought forth under the shade of a tree and its branches were used as a cradle. The tree provided fuel and fruit; its wood was made into crude houses and furniture and densely shaded groves gave sanctuary from enemies and the elements. The primitive peoples of today have expanded the uses of the tree to include agricultural implements, utensils, ornaments and musical instruments.

The subject of ethnobotany, or the inter-relationship between plants and people, chiefly the indigenous peoples, has shown that plants have influenced the intellectual as well as the material culture of man. Apart from being a major source of subsistence, plants influenced man's festivals, customs, ballads, stories, songs, legends, myths, rhymes, riddles and proverbs. The common and practical utility of the tree caused it to be regarded as a beneficent

object and gradually it was thought to be possessed of either good or evil spirits. This was a step leading toward the beginning of tree-worship.

The worship of the tree was not only the earliest form of divine ritual, but was the last to disappear in the west before the spread of Christianity. This conception fell into two classes...the tree-god, whose worship was organized into a definite religion, and tree-spirits, who often played jokes on unwary passers-by.

As man's image of his tree-god became more anthropomorphic, certain particular trees became sacred and symbolical to him and an attempt was made to express more clearly the man-like form of the god. The practice of giving the tree a human form by clothing it in garments or carving the stump in human form was the natural result of an artistic race groping its way toward a concrete expression of its ideas. Later, when people no longer believed that trees were gods, but only symbols of the deity, the oak tree became the symbol of the thundergod... Thor, Zeus and Jupiter.

Further indications of the power of the tree over people everywhere is the recurrence of tree images of a more general kind. The Bible speaks of the Tree of Knowledge, the Persians had their Tree of Immortality, the Aryans their World Tree Yggdrasil. We hear of the Buddhist Tree of Enlightenment, the Moslem Tree of

Hospitality and the Jewish Tree of Temptation.¹

With the advent of Christianity, tree-worship became sublimated, but vestiges of tree-cults can still be found among modern civilized people. The May pole was originally a tree; Christmas is cold indeed without mistletoe, holly and a gaily decorated tree. We honor our heroes with laurel and extend an olive branch as a symbol of peace and forgiveness.

To sit beneath a tree and deeply feel and think about it is to grasp a small idea of the inter-relationship between yourself and that tree. You are both constantly responding to external and internal stimuli; you are both constantly replacing old cells with new cells, participating in the growth-creation process. You begin to be aware of similar patterns; just as the tree branches, so do the fingers from your hand; veins become arteries, arteries become capillaries. As the structure-think process goes on, patterns of the outside world become related to the tree-form. We study forked lightning, a river and its tributaries from the air, frost crystals on a window, cracks in the bottom of a dried puddle, the skeleton of coral... and in each we realize the unity of natural things.

When man understands the structural relationships

1. Andreas Feininger, Trees, New York, The Viking Press, Inc., 1968, p. 31.

of nature-objects, he then gains insight into the growing processes which create the delicate interdependence of man and nature.

CHAPTER II

To Look at a Tree

Art is not an imitation of nature, but nature interpreted according to the individual. The nature-object depicted by the artist represents or expresses something that is beyond the retinal image; its effect depends on its representation in the medium of the mind. The artist does not reproduce nature in its totality; he isolates, abstracts and distorts, perceiving the natural world in terms of relationships.

The relationship of art to nature is one which deals with the structural process of nature. The color-form-structure of nature is seen as a building process, a growth process, or a process of creation. Looking at this constructive pattern, the artist observes and analyses the many ways by which nature achieves its beauty and no longer attempts to mime the reality of the past, but uses these structural relationships to create a new vision of nature.

This new vision of nature sees the unification of natural things, their similarity and their interdependence. A pattern develops, one of definite purpose with clarity and symmetry of organization. Nature as an actual constructive agent deals with form-in-development; the space

and time patterns of a particular object and its relationships to other objects seen in a similar way. Louis Sullivan has said "... we, in our art, are to follow nature's rhythms, because those processes, those rhythms, are vital, organic, coherent, logical... (and thus) give to our art a power, a vital, a creative beauty, that shall make with nature a harmony and not a discord." 2

To illustrate this growth pattern in nature, this structural form-in-development, I have chosen the tree as a point of departure. It is an organism that is alive... it organizes, grows, develops, expands, structure after structure, form after form. We cannot sit beneath a tree at a given moment and see it grow, but the pattern is constantly expanding and intensifying. External signals such as the changing seasons, affect the responses of a tree, but many of the living organism's changes are results of internal and unseen signals.

The classical artist found the tree a relatively simple nature-form to describe. His forests were composed of cylindrical stems of varying size crowned by conical or spherical leaf masses. Working as he did upon a flat surface, these ideas were expressed by means of perspective and several shades of each color to qualify mass. However I believe it is a more valid proposal to accept the tree

2. Louis Sullivan, Kindergarten Chats, Wittenborn and Company, 1955.

as being a series of vertical and modified horizontal elements. The verticals (or stems) and the horizontals (or branches) present themselves in such a way as to create over-lapping planes in various spatial positions and definite positive-negative shapes when seen against the sky. When regarded from this point of view, the tree's basic forms of cylinder, cone or sphere are understood as plane-linear aspects of a constructive pattern in nature. We see the more intimate view of its structure as based upon the growing and unfolding processes of nature itself.

CHAPTER III

To Record a Tree

The classical artist working on his flat canvas has something in common with modern printmakers dealing with the medium of wood-cuts. Both realize that they are working upon a two-dimensional surface... only height and width matter...the depth of the block makes no difference. Depth can be created upon the two-dimensional surface by placing the picture elements in varying spatial positions.

The finished product requires numerous preliminary sketches and concentrated thoughts before the wood block can be touched. It is during this thinking process that I am aware of the particular kind of wood that will provide the best working surface, the kind of paper that will be the most suitable and a mental image of the colors necessary. If more color than that of the wood block ink is needed, I prefer to use the silk-screen process, which gives uniform, flat, unobtrusive color that is easily combined with the wood-cut. Some of my prints are entirely done with the silk-screen in order to concentrate on the even planes of color obtainable. With this medium one can deal in a more concentrated manner with spatial positions than in the prints utilizing the linear-based compositions of a wood block alone.

The intricate twig patterns of a forest cannot be carved into a block of wood that is soft and easily split. That is why I choose fine pieces of maple; a wood that is pleasing to the eye with its closely-knit grain of delicate coloring and equally as pleasing to the touch. A certain sensory satisfaction comes from the action of well-sharpened tools upon the surface of a beautiful block and it is here that I am most concerned with the negative shapes of space... that part of the universe seen through the web-patterns of tree limbs.

It pleases me to know that from a part I am creating the whole; to trace the grain in a block of fine wood is to see that tree before you and to remember in detail the relating patterns of growth. The graphic quality of a wood-cut line lends itself well to the effect desired when combined with the texture of the wood itself. This wood texture is achieved by careful inking of the block in several thin layers to allow subtle illuminations of paper-color to shine through as sunlight is reflected from the tree's rough-textured bark, lichens and mosses. This color-meld, which is characteristic of all trees, accounts for my preference for a printing ink which is never a pure black. Rather, the black ink is used as a base, with other colors mixed in to produce a chromatic black, ranging from cool to warm. A small amount of transparent extender is added to the pure color to achieve a slightly thinner

inking quality which allows the paper to act as a coloring agent.

The block itself is given a thin coat of orange shellac in order to prevent the ink from sinking deeply into the surface, clogging the pores and obscuring the grain of the wood. Printing with the use of semi-transparent inks gives a sense of density that I find important.

Goethe has made a statement in an essay on nature that I find the perfect expression of what I have attempted to say in my prints.

"Nature! We are surrounded by her, embraced by her, impossible to release ourselves from her...She creates ever new forms; what exists has never existed before; what has existed returns not again---everything is new and yet always old...One obeys her laws even if one resists them; one works with her even if one wants to work against her... she is everything...she is harsh and gentle, lovely and fearful, weak and all-powerful. All is forever present in her...she has set me within. She will also lead me without. I commit myself to her." 3

3. Helen Walker Puner, Freud, His Life and His Mind, New York, Dell Publishing Company, 1959, pp. 48-49.

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APPENDIX A

Catalogue of the Exhibition

Title	Size	Medium
1. Bristlecone Pine	20 x 24 1/2	one block
2. Christopher Entangled	11 1/4 x 14 3/4	one block silkscreen
3. Fort Worth	12 3/4 x 17	one block
4. If We See Nature	14 1/2 x 16	silkscreen
5. Inversion	5 1/4 x 12	one block
6. Japanese Apricot	7 x 14 1/2	one block
7. Leafstalk	5 1/2 x 12	one block
8. Moon Forest	13 1/4 x 15 1/2	silkscreen
9. September Has A Thousand Days	8 x 11 3/4	one block
10. Snow Trees I	7 x 9	two blocks
11. Snow Trees II	12 x 16	one block
12. Ten of Six	11 1/4 x 15 1/2	one block
13. Wilderness	5 x 12	two blocks
14. Yeddo	19 x 22 1/2	one block

Note: All sizes are given in inches.